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THE FEDERAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

BY OWEN R. LOVEJOY,
General Secretary, National Child Labor Committee.

The National Child Labor Committee has apparently gone far afield from its distinctive purpose in making its persistent appeal for a Federal Children's Bureau. For manifestly such a service as we urge would affect the lives of many beside working children. This proposition, however, is based upon our estimate of the worth of the child to American society. The child, from the standpoint of national life, is our most valuable asset. Human labor and intelligence, operating upon our natural physical resources, create our material wealth. Human labor, intelligence and virtue are the forces creating, propagating and maintaining the social and political institutions which at once utilize and safeguard our material resources. In two decades all these interests will be in the hands of the children of to-day. We believe the establishment of this bureau will affect all child-helping agencies and we shall share in the benefit.

Our argument for the bureau is as follows:

I. SPECIAL AGENCY REQUIRED

No government agency in the United States is at present equipped or adapted to collect and disseminate information regarding the health, efficiency, character and training of children.

The people of our country recognize very well the importance of investigating all other matters. All other forms of our welfare are being pretty carefully looked after, perhaps for the reason our chairman has advanced, because of our desire to conserve and utilize all our material resources. We have gone so far, that while we may have very strong ideas as to state rights, when it comes to the question of the development of material resources we recognize very generally the unity of our nation and have established under our federal government something like one hundred and seventeen bureaus for the study of every kind of question. If a man in Texas finds that one of his hogs has cholera he sends a telegram to Washington, and if it seems a serious case something like a

hundred or more of our Washington experts will go down to Texas and make an examination of that hog. If a child is in need of assistance and its mother cannot give it, and no local expert is available, there is no source at Washington or anywhere else under the American flag to which she can appeal for aid.

The government bureaus most closely related to the purposes sought are the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor and the Bureau of Education. Were it possible to secure the end desired through any of these existing agencies, the advocates of the pending bill would gladly withdraw their propaganda and refer the matter to such agency. Nor have we failed to take cognizance of these government instruments and seek advice from them.

II. RELATED AGENCIES

Census Bureau

To the question whether the service contemplated in this bill could be rendered by the Census Bureau we have the following reply from Hon. S. N. D. North, former Director of the Census:

"We do not want to divert our energies into studies of physical degeneracy, of orphanage, of juvenile delinquency and juvenile courts, and all that class of questions which are not statistical questions. The Census Office is a purely statistical office"

Bureau of Labor

Many items of information sought relate to occupational activities of the child, and advice was therefore sought from the Bureau of Labor. In reply to our question, Hon. Charles P. Neill, Commissioner of Labor, says:

"I do not believe you could get the same quality of ability to do this work under the Bureau of Labor as you could have it, say, under an independent bureau. I do not believe if the government is going to spend money at all in this particular line that it will be economical or that we shall get the best results if it attempts simply to make use to a limited extent of existing organizations, no one of which, so far as I know, is equipped or could equip itself without some departure from its proper line of work, to study these things as thoroughly and as fundamentally as they ought to be studied."

Bureau of Education

The Bureau of Education was next consulted, and the following reply received from Hon. Elmer E. Brown, Commissioner of Education:

"For such work as the Bureau of Education has to do, it is important that such work as is here advised should be done somewhere. We cannot deal properly with the large questions of the education of children without a more detailed and accurate knowledge than we now possess as to the actual conditions surrounding the child life of the country, such conditions as are referred to in this bill. I think the best way to accomplish this end is by the passage of such a bill as this and the establishment of a separate bureau."

III. WASTE AND CONFUSION

In default of any government agency directly responsible for this work, local methods of dealing with the various problems of childhood are at present in a state of chaos.

This fact is revealed by a study of the work of agencies interested in child welfare.

Dependents

(1) Institutions and associations for the care of dependent or orphan children show the widest diversity in nature and method, and exhibit a lack of co-ordination truly appalling. Between some of these agencies bitter rivalry exists, while no authoritative source of information can be appealed to for a statement of the plans that have proven most economical, humane and constructive.

At the hearing before the House Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department, January 27, 1909, Hon. Homer Folks, Secretary of the New York State Charities Aid Association, estimated that the cost of supporting over 90,000 dependent children in institutions is between \$15,000,000 and \$20,000,000 annually. In addition to these 90,000 children he estimated that from 40,000 to 50,000 more were cared for in other ways, but he said, "there is no authoritative statement of the total amount of such work and far less in authoritative inter-relation of the nature of the work, of the results, of the experience, of what becomes of these children, or what kind of citizens they are making, and what we

wish to urge upon you is that we spend a little money to find out if this \$25,000,000 or \$30,000,000 a year that is being spent is being spent to the best advantage, and if this average of 140,000 or 150,000 children who are under the care of charitable agencies are turning out well. We would like to know how the scheme is really working."

Why should there not be agreement? Wise plans are being adopted in some parts of the country. Unwise plans are followed in others. Why should not these, our best citizens, have access to the very best methods applied anywhere?

Delinquents

(2) Agencies for dealing with delinquent children manifest a similar lack of co-ordination.

Jane Addams, of Hull House, Chicago, says:

"We have recently been startled to find that four-fifths of all the arrests in the criminal courts of Chicago are of boys between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, of whom the large majority are under nineteen. This is so menacing that we should like to know whether the same condition is met in other American cities, or whether Chicago is unique in this excess of criminality among its youth. At present there is no method by which this may be determined. The proposed children's bureau could collect and distribute the very sort of information most valuable to those who are struggling with the problem of juvenile delinquency as well as with other grave matters connected with the lives of city children."

Juvenile courts and systems of probation have been established in a number of leading cities. But at present no agency is charged with collecting for convenient use the latest and most valuable information gleaned from the experiences of these local agencies. In default of this, obsolete methods are continually being introduced in certain localities, although in other localities their disuse has followed their proven ineffectiveness.

Local juvenile court judges and probation officers are seriously interrupted in their work by inquiries from other states and foreign countries for statements of the history and methods of their work. A central clearing house of information would not only serve to reduce to a minimum mistakes and worthless experimentation, but would relieve these overworked local officials of a valuable public

service they should not be compelled to render, and which could be better performed through a federal bureau.

Health

(3) We have at present no information on infant mortality, illegitimacy, race degeneracy, health and training of the child on any national scale. In default of this information there is continual difference of opinion as to the extent and nature of evils that threaten child life.

One example will illustrate the point. Passing by the accidents and dangers associated with mine and factory employment of children, note the new attack upon our work by those, who, purporting to represent the views of an official of the United States Public Health and Marine Hospital Service, contend that at one point at least our propaganda is injuring rather than helping the child. This they do by contrasting the hookworm with the cotton mill. They picture the cotton mill as a blessing to the germ-cursed millions of the South, and intimate that when all facts are known child labor advocates will see the wrong they have done Southern children by seeking to exclude them from the mills.

The Hookworm

I confess it is a little difficult to follow their argument. One hundred years of experience in textile industry in England and many years experience in this and other countries have produced evidence convincing to leaders in the medical profession that child labor in textile mills is injurious. The claim is even made that for strong, healthy, well-nourished children the textile mill is detrimental, that the long hours, moist atmosphere (particularly in cotton mills) and eye strain in many departments are a menace. Yet we are now asked to believe that children diseased, poorly fed, half-clad, whose vital organs and lifeblood are being sucked away by the hookworm, are benefited by the long hours and hard labor of the cotton mill.

The contention that the cotton mill is the only alternative to hookworm is not borne out by the teachings of Dr. Stiles. He claims that from 15 to 75 cents' worth of medicine will cure the disease. If this is true the cash outlay is certainly a more economic investment than the dedication of twelve-year-old boys and girls to a twelve-hour day or a ten-hour night in a textile mill.

Investigations of hookworm show that it is perpetuated and propagated chiefly by soil pollution. Valuable instruction is given by Dr. Stiles and others for the purification of soil in the vicinity of dwelling houses and for the proper construction and care of sanitary toilets, where adequate sewerage systems are not available. If there were a guarantee that every family from the sand barrens who moves into a cotton mill village would follow these instructions implicitly the hope of curing the disease by migration would be increased; but every one familiar with such communities knows that not over 1 per cent. of the people literally follow the instructions of Dr. Stiles and other sanitary experts.

If the disease is due to soil pollution what guarantee have we that in ten years the ground of the cotton-mill villages will not be as foul as that in the vicinity of the old farm house in the hills? Should it become polluted, we shall face the necessity of curing hookworm disease in a mill population which, although better housed and better fed than formerly, will lack the resisting power of those who live in the open air.

The present situation with regard to this subject is extremely unfortunate. Every person in the South interested in the factory employment of little children is to-day quoting the statements that purport to come from these government officials, but which doubtless in reality have come from publicity experts of popular periodicals as a defense of the exploitation of the little child. That due regard should be given to interests of primitive communities is recognized, and in many instances families who migrate from their remote cabins in the sand hills to the newly built cotton villages find the economic necessities of the new environment extremely hard. The low standard of wages in many of these mills lays a heavy burden on the family purse, and one can readily understand the eagerness of the parent to utilize the frail services of infant hands to eke out the family income. But that the employment of tender children for a ten-hour or twelve-hour day is a necessity in that or any other part of the country we emphatically deny. The time has come when the standards of our country must indignantly repudiate the principle that our industrial progress and the domestic independence of our people are built on such a foundation.

Frankly, it puts the manufacturers, who defend this child employment, in little better light to follow their line of excuse for

child labor. Science and experience teach that factory labor tends to make children pale and to interfere with their physical development. Now we are met by a class of practical economists who tell us that instead of making children sick in their factories, they are engaged in the employment of sick children.

If conditions of farm life are as much worse than conditions in the cotton mill, as is claimed, we believe we have a two-fold reason for a most persistent, vigorous campaign of education in sanitary reform. This point could be settled by the services of such a bureau as is here proposed. Instead of appearing as hostile, there should be the most cordial and intimate co-operation, but co-operation can come only as a result of a fair and impartial report from authoritative sources. I bespeak the representatives of the National Child Labor Committee in saying that we welcome all information that can be gathered regarding abuse or neglect of little children anywhere, and so far as that abuse or neglect relates to or may be affected by their industrial occupations, we stand ready to use all our efforts in their behalf.

No adequate birth records are kept outside the registration area. Dr. Livingston Farrand, executive secretary of the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, says:

"As the organized crusade against tuberculosis develops, it is becoming more and more evident that one of the most fundamental problems is that of tuberculosis in children and the methods of dealing with it. In planning and organizing such efforts we are met at once by the lack of authoritative information regarding conditions, and the co-operation of an official children's bureau such as that under consideration, would be of inestimable service to our movement."

Play

(4) The need for information on the part of those seeking to safeguard the leisure of childhood can best be voiced in the words of America's most eminent specialist in the development of recreation for children, Dr. Luther Halsey Gulick, president of the Playground Association of America:

"The street education of children is bad education. It usually means the immoral approach to some of the most holy relations in life. It means physical danger from being run over. It means

inadequate opportunity for play. Children need sandpiles, seesaws, swings, places where they can play ball and the like. Children also need wholesome play traditions. The development of the modern city as well as the development of the modern specialized farm have made new conditions for children, which must be thoroughly studied and met if the children are to continue to grow up wholesome. The development of the city boys' gang into the political unit is, as Jacob Riis has called, and I agree with him in calling, the chief peril of American politics. Nobody is competent to deal with this situation, saving some branch of the national government. It is not a phase of education. It cannot be handled, save by some such power as is contemplated. These are the reasons why I believe in the children's bureau."

Child Labor

(5) A glance at the laws regulating the employment of children and at the census returns of occupations in which child labor is involved, reveals the inequality of these conditions and of the legislation sought to regulate them. All states, with one exception, have laws regulating employment of children. In no two states are these laws alike. Experience indicates that every year in some state radical legislation is sought by enthusiastic advocates, which has already proven unavailing in other states; or conservative legislation is blocked by ignorance and prejudice, although its operation in other states has proven its wisdom.

To have a government source of information to which the people interested in this work could appeal, would be an achievement alone justifying the establishment of the proposed bureau. It is the contention of those opposed to child labor that the government should be able to furnish inquirers with a substantially accurate estimate of the number of children employed in various occupations, the conditions under which they labor, and, so far as discernible, the effects—economic, physical, educational, moral—of such employment.

IV. CO-OPERATION OF PRIVATE AGENCIES

The activity of private organizations would properly begin where the government service ends, by taking the information at hand and organizing propaganda for correction of whatever evils are found to exist.

V. MODEST ESTIMATE

The bill provides for a total annual appropriation of \$51,820, including office accommodations. This appropriation does not appear excessive, in view of what the government already expends with the greatest popular approval in the establishment of other bureaus.

VI. PUBLIC INTEREST

Agencies and individuals qualified by experience to judge the wisdom of such a proposal have given it hearty approval.

Agencies

The National Child Labor Committee, which drafted the bill, has been engaged for five years in efforts to secure improved legislation and the enforcement of laws in behalf of working children. Recognizing the importance of the authoritative information sought, this committee made the interests of the bill a principal feature of its work during the past congressional session, and at present devotes a substantial portion of its energies to correspondence and conference with the multitude of people interested in the project.

On January 25-26, 1909, at a Conference on Dependent Children called by President Roosevelt at the White House, representatives of child-helping agencies from all parts of the country were present. This was the most representative body ever assembled to consider the problems of dependent children. A resolution was unanimously adopted as follows:

A bill is pending in Congress for a Federal Children's Bureau, to collect and disseminate information affecting the welfare of children. In our judgment, the establishment of such a bureau is desirable, and we earnestly recommend the enactment of the pending measure.

The National Consumers' League, in its Tenth Annual Report (1909), says:

The following are some of the points on which it is hoped that the bureau, when established, may furnish enlightenment:

1. How many blind children are there in the United States? Where are they? What provision for their education is made? How many of them are receiving training for self-support? What are the causes of their blindness? What steps are taken to prevent blindness?

2. How many mentally subnormal children are there in the United

States, including idiots, imbeciles and children sufficiently self-directing to profit by special classes in school? Where are these children? What provision is made for their education? What does it cost? How many of them are receiving training for self-support?

3. How many fatherless children are there in the United States? Of these, how many fathers are dead? How many are illegitimate? How many are deserters? In cases in which the father is dead, what killed him? It should be known how much orphanage is due to tuberculosis, how much to industrial accidents, etc. Such knowledge is needful for the removal of preventable causes of orphanage.

4. We know something about juvenile illiteracy once in ten years. This subject should be followed up every year. It is not a matter of immigrant children, but of a permanent, sodden failure of the Republic to educate a half million children of native English-speaking citizens. Current details are now unattainable.

5. Experience in Chicago under the only effective law on this subject in this country indicates that grave crimes against children are far more common than is generally known. There is no official source of wider information upon which other States may base improved legislation or administration.

6. How many children are employed in manufacture? In commerce? In the telegraph and messenger service? How many children are working under ground in mines? How many at the mine's mouth? Where are these children? What are the mine labor laws applicable to children? We need a complete annual directory of state officials whose duty it is to enforce child labor laws. This for the purpose of stimulating to imitation those states which have no such officials, as well as for arousing public interest in the work of the existing officials.

7. We need current information as to juvenile courts, and they need to be standardized. For instance, no juvenile court keeps a record of the various occupations pursued by the child before its appearance in court beyond, in some cases, the actual occupation at the time of the offense committed. Certain occupations are known to be demoralizing to children, but the statistics which would prove this are not now kept. It is reasonable to hope that persistent, recurrent inquiries from the Federal Children's Bureau may induce local authorities to keep their records in such form as to make them valuable both to the children concerned and to children in parts of the country which have no similar institutions.

8. There is no accepted standard of truancy work. In some places truant officers report daily, in others weekly, in some monthly, in others, never. Some truant officers do no work whatever in return for their salaries. There should be some standard of efficiency for work of this sort, but first we need to know the facts.

9. Finally, and by far the most important, we do not know how many children are born each year or how many die, or why they die. We need statistics of nativity and morality. What Dr. Goler has done for Rochester should be made known to all the health authorities in the United States,

and the success or failure of the others in reaching his standards should be published with ceaseless reiteration.

The American Federation of Labor at the meeting in Toronto sent to the President of the United States the following telegram:

TORONTO, Ontario, November 21, 1909.

Hon. William H. Taft, President United States, Washington, D. C.

Executive Council American Federation of Labor respectfully urges, among other important matters affecting labor legislation, you will recommend to Congress the establishment of a Children's Bureau.

SAMUEL GOMPERS,
President American Federation of Labor.

The measure has the formal endorsement of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and nearly all state federations of Women's Clubs, the Clark University Conference on Child Welfare and other national bodies, while a mere catalogue of resolutions from charity-organization societies, state and national church conferences, local churches, clubs, associations, labor unions and other bodies would exceed the limits of this address.

Individuals

Concrete reasons for establishing this bureau have been submitted to Congress by the leading authorities in work among children, including:

Samuel McCune Lindsay, Ph.D., director New York School of Philanthropy, New York City.

Lillian D. Wald, founder and head worker, Henry Street Settlement, New York City.

Thomas F. Walsh, president Colorado Humane Society, Denver.

Leo Arnstein, manufacturer, New York City.

Charles R. Henderson, Ph.D., professor sociology, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Edward T. Devine, Ph.D., editor, *The Survey*, New York City.

William H. Baldwin, Washington, D. C.

Henry B. Favill, M.D., Chicago, Ill.

John Mitchell, vice-president American Federation of Labor, New York City.

Mrs. Philip N. Moore, president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, St. Louis, Mo.

Bernard Flexner, chairman Juvenile Court Board, Louisville, Ky.

Mrs. Florence Kelley, general secretary, National Consumers' League, New York City.

Hon. Julian W. Mack, judge of Circuit Court, Cook County, Chicago, Ill.

Ludwig B. Bernstein, Ph.D., superintendent, Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum, New York City.

Dr. A. J. McKelway, secretary for the Southern States, National Child Labor Committee, Atlanta, Ga.

VII. ENDORSEMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES

This measure was carefully reviewed by the House Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department (January 27, 1909) and by the Senate Committee on Education and Labor (February 4, 1909).

The time at the disposal of the committees was fully occupied by advocates of the measure and no word was spoken in opposition. Following these hearings the bill received the endorsement of both committees. From these reports we quote:

Senate Committee on Education and Labor, February 11, 1909, Frank P. Flint, chairman:

The committee believes that such facts as may be scientifically ascertained and may be published in popular form concerning the child life of the nation will be of inestimable advantage. We believe it would be entirely within the province of the National Government to secure scientific and reliable information along these lines concerning the general welfare of the children of the nation. Other nations have already advanced beyond our own in researches of this kind.

House Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department, Gilbert N. Haugen, chairman, February 13, 1909:

The legislation affecting the children that is being enacted by many States could be wisely directed with the information that would be obtained through such a bureau. The light that would come up in the treatment of the problems of childhood would enable the various private individuals, organizations and states, to multiply many fold the value of the work for the nation that is now being done by them by giving them the benefit of each other's experience and knowledge.